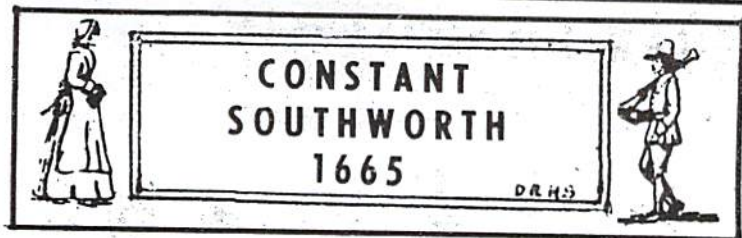


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A part time project of researching deeds and wills at the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds for the past six months has shown that two of Duxbury's oldest houses are linked closely and unusually in their histories.

"Crab Island" and "Cranberry Cottage" near the Mill Brook on Tremont St. follow different lines of ownership in their respective histories but were found to overlap with three owners: William Coomer, between the years of 1747 and 1768; Edward Southworth, from 1678 to 1719; and Constant Southworth, from 1646 to 1678.

Deeds showed that both properties were owned by these men at one time or another, probably due to the mill operations of the respective days. Beginning in 1646, Millbrook was the site of three mills, with Constant Southworth purchasing the first "sufficient water milne to grynde corne of both english and indian" from William Hiller. Southworth's grandson, John, started the second mill in the 1740's near the present site of Crab Island after the first fell into disrepair. The third mill at another nearby sight covered the wide range of manufacturing in the 1800's from shoes and tacks to sails and towels. Today, only the historic marker and a few mill stones in the brook bear silent testimony to the economic operations which were major in the development of the town and region.

Researching both houses from their present owners--Michael and Susan Schofield at Cranberry Cottage and Mrs. Edward Hodgkins at Crab Island--revealed an overlap in owners with William Coomer around 1747, thus tying both houses into the mill operation. Coomer, who purchased the mill from a partnership which included John Southworth in 1747, bought the cottage from William Southworth in 1750. He then sold Cranberry Cottage to Thomas Weston in 1756, and the mill operation and another dwelling house, Crab Island, to Edward Winslow in 1768. From this point, the two houses follow their different paths from Weston and Winslow down to the present owners.

Coomer came into both properties through the death of John Southworth in 1750. John, who never married, had appointed William Southworth, his nephew, executor of his will. John had come into sole possession of the mill following the death of his brother, Constant, and had launched the partnership for the second mill, which was eventually bought out by Coomer, and these two properties had been part of a larger parcel of land owned by Edward Southworth, father of both Constant and John, who died in 1719. Edward split his holdings among his sons after inheriting them from his own father, also named Constant Southworth, in 1678.

The original Southworth arrived in Plymouth in mid-summer of 1623 with his mother and brother on the ship "Anne" out of London. He struck out for Duxbury years later, bought the original mill from William Hiller in 1646, served in the government of the Colony, and fought in King Phillip's War.

According to Justin Winsor's "History of Duxbury" Constant Southworth's home burned in 1665. Either Cranberry Cottage or Crab Island would seem to stem from this date, becoming Southworth's new home until his death in 1678, with the companion house being older.

Probably the Crab Island house precedes the 1665 date, and possibly even the 1646 date attributed by its owners, since the land in the area and evidence of dwellings in the deeds go back as far as 1639. Records discuss the land in conjunction with both William Hiller and Robert Mendame. Since Hiller purchased land approximating the area from John Irish in 1641 in exchange for Hiller's earlier house, slightly to the south, it is even possible for the land to go beyond the 1639 date through Irish.

One of the most interesting aspects of the research in regards to Duxbury history was finding Edward Southworth's will of 1719, apparently overlooked by earlier historians since it clearly places most of the Southworth land further north than previously estimated. This was discernable from the description of the land in relation to the Mill Brook.

Interestingly, just as the deeds show recurring mention of two houses as the mill changed hands, so too is there a clear reference to two different houses in the mill area as far back as the Hiller-Mendame-Irish days of the 1630's and 1640's. However, Justin Winsor wrote that fire "Burned down" Constant Southworth's house about 1665. Since there were no records to take it beyond that date, Cranberry Cottage appears to have been built about that time by Southworth as his new home, perhaps on or near the site of an earlier dwelling.

Michael Schofield, researcher